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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM CD ASEC
SUBJECT: "THE CHADIAN ILLNESS:" OPPOSITION
LEADER ON PROSPECTS FOR DIALOGUE

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Armed opposition groups must be brought to the table if a national dialogue is to have any hope of success and the "Chadian illness" of armed rebellion is to be cured, former Chadian Prime Minister Alengue told us July 20. The respected opposition leader stressed that it is up to President Deby to take the initiative. Unlike some opposition members, who have insisted on holding new presidential elections, Alengue was open to accepting President Deby's new mandate, as long as significant executive authority is handed over to a government committed to reform. End Summary.

¶12. (U) On July 20, the Ambassador received opposition member Jean Alengue at the residence. Alengue is currently a prominent member of the CPDC (an alliance of opposition parties), but served as Prime Minister under Hissein Habre, and also under President Deby early in his rule. The conversation centered around the current political climate in Chad, after President Deby's election victory in May, the need for continued efforts to promote political dialogue, and the viability of the GoC's "committee of wise men" a group formed by the President and tasked with, among other things, meeting with non-armed opposition groups like the CPDC.

ARMED OPPOSITION: "LE MAL TCHADIEN"

¶13. (U) One serious sticking point in advancing political dialogue in Chad thus far has been whether or not and to what extent to include armed opposition groups. Throughout their wide-ranging discussion, Alengue returned several times to this point. In his view, armed opposition groups are a "Chadian illness" ["le mal tchadien"], and they are a problem that can no longer be

ignored. According to Alengue, Chad has a history of moving from one leader to another, and one dialogue to another, while allowing politico-military forces to remain active in the background. Until these forces are brought to the table and/or dealt with directly, there can be no lasting stability in Chad. Armed opposition will act as a destabilizing force on an already fragile regime.

¶4. (U) Alengue's proposed solution to this is simple, on the surface: politico-military groups must be brought to the table if any real dialogue is to succeed. He stated very clearly that the political opposition parties, such as those represented by the CPDC, "will tell them that there is no room for weapons," and that "the politico-military groups are part of the crisis." At the same time, Alengue points out that many armed opposition members are Chadian, and, therefore, the GOC and opposition parties should understand their perspective by including them. "We are heading for a coup d'etat," Alengue says, "and including the politico-military groups [in a dialogue] is a way out of the crisis."

SKEPTICISM FOR COMMITTEE OF WISE MEN

¶5. (U) President Deby's government, in an effort to answer calls from opposition groups and the international community for political dialogue, has set up a "committee of wise men" to explore issues of concern to all sides and advise the President on possible ways to move forward. The committee is made up of at least one former president

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and many prominent political figures. Alengue stated that he has not yet met formally with the group, but that, while he has great respect for some of the people on the committee, he was skeptical that they can move beyond the current impasse. Indeed, Alengue believed the ball is squarely in President Deby's court: "the whole system comes from him-s, begins and ends with him, so he can't expect a dialogue to work [] unless he makes the first step," Alengue says.

NEW ELECTIONS?

¶6. (U) The Ambassador asked what Alengue viewed as the pre-conditions for a successful dialogue, including whether the opposition still insisted that President Deby step down. Alengue stated that there are no pre-conditions in his mind. He saw a number of possible directions, but believed that the key to success will be to deal with the politico-military opposition. The Ambassador pointed out the demand by some members of the opposition new presidential elections would quite likely bring only stalemate. Alengue conceded this point, and said that he personally is open to other options. For example, presidential powers could be handed over in large part to a strong government headed by a strong Prime Minister. Under such an 'intermediate solution', Alengue said, President Deby should agree not to run in 2011. However, Alengue held firm to the belief that putting such changes in place would require substantial changes to Chad's constitution. A further complication appears to be that, while Alengue does not view Deby stepping down as a pre-condition to dialogue, the armed opposition most likely does.

A DIVIDED CHAD

¶7. (SBU) Alengue expressed some optimism that there are possible solutions on the horizon. He believes that Chad needs someone to bring people together he used the

French term 'un rassembleur' on the political front. If public finances were better managed, Alengue asserted, Chad's ethnic problems would disappear. Alengue stated that, contrary to popular opinion, Chadians do not want to be divided, and hunger for a sense of national unity. He strongly criticized the French for, in his opinion, "manipulating ethnic divisions to their own advantage" in the past, and for continuing to speak of a divided Chad. However, he reiterated the need for presidential powers to be significantly reduced if such divisions can really be overcome.

Comment

¶ 8. (SBU) Alengue comes across as a serious and reasoned voice among an often fractious opposition. He was very open to our suggestions, which he welcomed as valuable food for thought.

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